

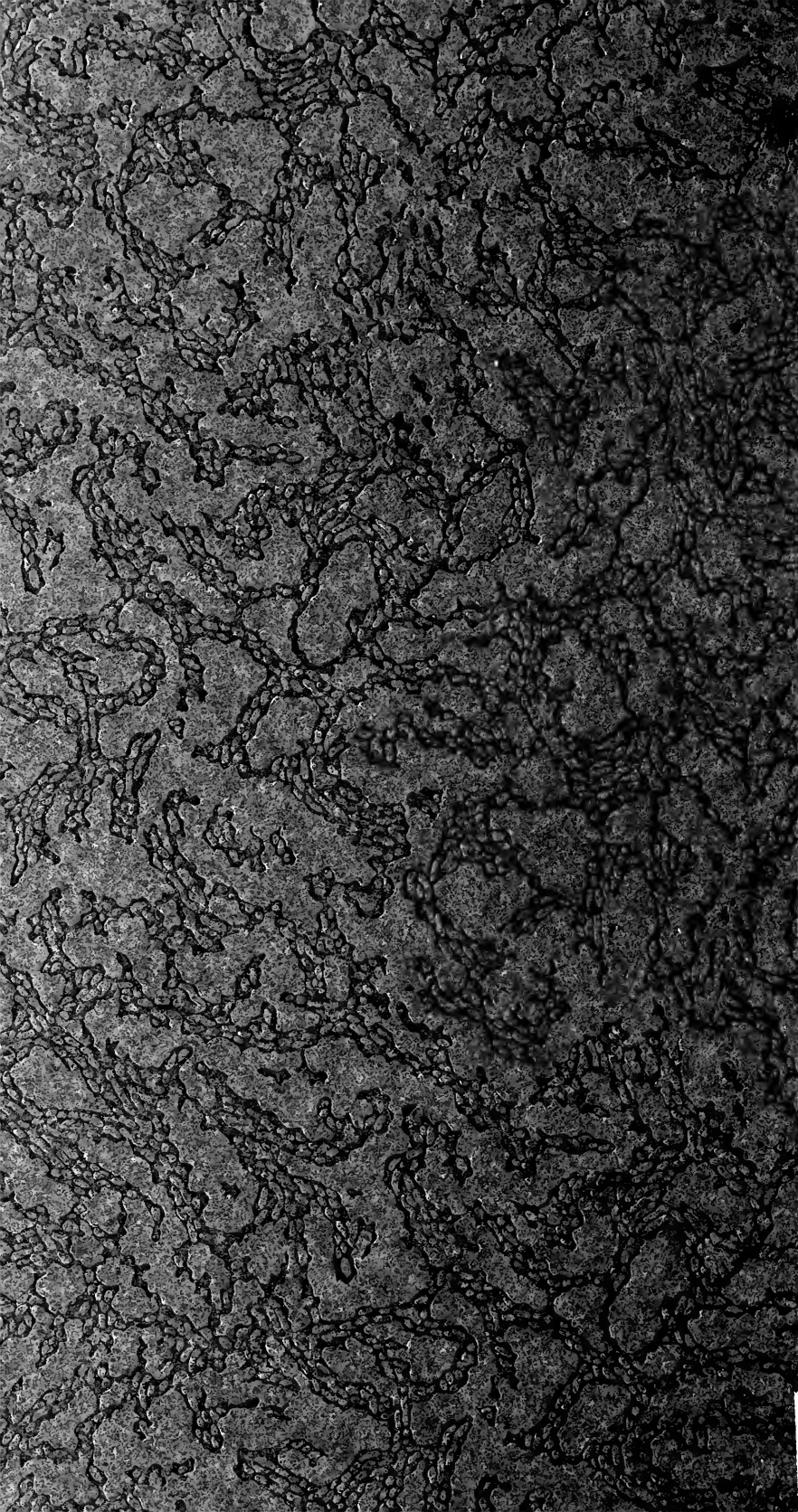
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VII

JACOB GRIMM

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING
OF THE PHILOLOGICAL SOCIETY ON
FRIDAY, MAY 7, 1915

BY

WILLIAM PATON KER
PRESIDENT

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JACOB GRIMM

STUDENTS of language might some time consider the problem of value which offers itself when conventional words are required to express a genuine sentiment. It is one of the troubles of advancing age, that what was hackneyed in youth becomes hackneyed ever more and more: there are customary phrases prescribed for solemn occasions, and respectable speakers will repeat them and feel no discomfort, and respectable audiences will accept them as their due. But in the Philological Society, where no word is lifeless, how can the President repeat merely the ordinary formulas about the great honour done him by his election? Yet what less, or more, can he say? Less would seem churlish, and more might seem too effusive. I can only assure the Society that I am deeply sensible of the honour, and grateful to them for their generous confidence.

Naturally when one is called to fill a place of dignity and responsibility, one thinks of those who have held it before; valiant men who have gone, and who leave the encouragement of their good work to those that come after. Might I claim the auspices of Henry Sweet for my tenure of this presidential chair? I think I might; I have many proofs of his friendship; his ingenuous and humorous judgement of studies not his own, or not peculiarly his own, has often been pleasant to me and is perpetually good to remember. I pay my homage once more to Skeat, the unwearied athlete of philology; he carried into this business the speed of nature which gained for his unknown progenitor the significant old Danish nickname or surname of which Skeat was always rightly proud. And sitting in this siege perilous need I doubt that Furnivall would have been glad to see me here? Glad to provide fresh duties for the President; enjoying his troubles and always ready to share them.

I ask leave of the Society to read a short essay on one of the greatest of our ancestors, whose work I very imperfectly know and am in very few particulars competent to judge, but who has been much in my mind ever since I took to Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic; a great example of the life of a student—Jacob Grimm, one of the men whom one comes to know personally through their writings. I may say that I have a reason of my own for thinking reverently of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, because the first written communication I ever had from Vigfusson and York Powell was the joint inscription on the copy of their Grimm Centenary pamphlet which they gave me when it appeared. I was late in making the acquaintance of Vigfusson; I grudge the time when I might have known him, might have learned from him, and did not; but I did know him for some years before I bade him farewell, and I have his ‘G.V.’ written along with ‘F.Y.P.’ on the little book dedicated to the memory of the brothers Grimm—in which he tells of his visit to Jacob Grimm in Berlin in 1859. I do not think I am wrong when I say that this paper is suggested by Vigfusson and York Powell and is an expression of the same regard as they had for the scholars who showed the way.

Philology with Jacob Grimm¹ was part of a study to which I think he gives no particular name. It was history, it was Germany, it was the Middle Ages, the Humanities, Nature, the Human Race. He began his proper work as a lawyer. The *Grammar* is dedicated to Savigny, his professor at Marburg; in January 1805, when Grimm was twenty, Savigny called him to Paris to help him with the history of Roman Law. We may thus look on the *Deutsche Rechtsalterthümer* and the *Weisthümer* as the works of Jacob Grimm that came most naturally and directly from his early university work.

But while he practised method and clearness in the study of law, his real interests were in language and the history of literature. Savigny had his part in this also; it was

¹ Most of this essay was written before I read the very interesting book of M. Tonnelat, *Les frères Grimm, leur œuvre de jeunesse*, 1912. I wish to acknowledge my obligations to the author for much more than I have here borrowed from him.

through him that the brothers Grimm made acquaintance with Arnim and Brentano; *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* has something of Savigny in it. Jacob Grimm made his profit out of Napoleon and the new kingdom of Westphalia; as librarian to King Jerome at Wilhelmshöhe he had the lightest of duties and plenty of time for his own reading. He wrote and published the little book on the *Meistergesang* (Göttingen 1811: preface dated Cassel 19 August 1810), and in this he declares his mind; the principles of his later work may be found here. It is the summary of a literary argument that had been going on for some years, so that the work has little of improvisation in it; it is all mature and well considered. He confesses that the subject is dry and difficult; he would much rather be doing something else; he wants to be at the epic stories, pleasant to work and rich in results. At the same time he affirms that in the history of poetry there is nothing dead or dry. He will have nothing to do with any system that makes peremptory divisions. 'A receptive mind for all that lives and moves'—that, he says, is the chief requisite in all historical inquiry. Phrases like these are easily repeated and turned to canting rhetoric. One asks for 'something more precise', like the Duke of Wellington with the Holy Alliance. Grimm has been censured, over and over again, for romantic enthusiasm. He is fond of the word 'mysterious', *geheimnissvoll*. All his life he maintains the difference between *Natur-* and *Kunstpoesie*, and often in ways that may seem to be superstitious. But in this first book of his he never forgets what he had learned in method and logic from Savigny; and while he uses dangerous categories like 'evolution', his steps of proof are all made secure with evidence. His main thesis is the continuity between *Minnesang* and *Meistergesang*; the proofs are chiefly from the forms of verse, from the rule of triplicity in the stanza (the trefoil is engraved as an emblem on his title page), and the proofs require a number of references which do not make light reading. Carlyle could make little of it; it is a pity he had not patience to find out what Grimm meant in his essay, for Grimm is like Carlyle, and like Burke, in his reverence

for the mystery of human life—‘the great mysterious incorporation of the human race’—and like them also in his attention to particular facts.

All through the treatise the modern reader is kept humble as he recognizes at what disadvantage Grimm is working and how well he does without the plentiful editions, glossaries, and literary histories which were not existent in his day; particularly how he is compelled to leave the Provençal poetry alone for want of printed editions. It must be allowed that he is prejudiced here, and does not want to recognize any Provençal influence upon German lyric. But indeed he had not at that time the materials for judging. Modern scholars, who dabble in small patches of Grimm’s garden, may often be horrified at the courage of their founder; where he cannot find information he goes on without it. An example of this recklessness is the Middle English part of the *Grammar*, which is compiled out of Ritson’s and Weber’s *Romances* in the most summary and unscrupulous manner.

The *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* appeared, vol. i in 1812, vol. ii in 1815. This, the best known of their books, seems to have come to them almost without thinking. Folk tales could be picked up anywhere in Hesse, at their very doors. They were left to Wilhelm Grimm to comment and illustrate, while Jacob kept them in mind for his *Mythology* later. Wilhelm shared in many other works of that time; particularly in that lone first volume of the *Elder Edda* where in translation of the old Northern poems (beginning with Völund’s Lay and going down to the Death-ride of Brynhild) is shown the same skill of narrative style as in the popular tales. Jacob by himself about the same time published one of the pleasantest of all his collections, the little volume of Spanish ballads, *Silva de romances viejos*—which shows that he could occasionally wander away from his old German forests. He seems to have spent more time on Slavonic than on the Romance languages, but anything of the nature of a ballad appealed to him. The Spanish preface of his little *romancero*, and the notes, few though they be, show that he was not content merely to reprint from the old Spanish song-book

which had fallen in his way some years before. About the same time he was busy with the old French *Roman de Renart*, preparing his book on the Beast Epic which among all his works was his favourite. But *Reinhart Fuchs* did not appear till 1834.

The *Deutsche Sagen* by the two brothers were published in 1816 and 1818; then in 1818 the first volume of the *Grammar*. Jacob Grimm was in his 34th year. He had done much scholarly work, both historical and critical, but nothing hitherto strictly and severely grammatical. And the *German Grammar*, one of the great philological works of the great age, appears to the author of it sometimes as only a kind of by-product, or at best an instrument, of the history of German poetry. This comes out most clearly in the *Preface* to the second edition (1822), which is not reprinted in the *Kleinere Schriften*, though it is one of the most characteristic essays of Jacob Grimm:—

‘It was the attraction of Middle High German poetry that led me first to engage in grammatical investigations; the other older dialects, with unreserved exception of the Old Northern and in less degree of the Anglo-Saxon, offer little poetry. There is a considerable quantity indeed of Middle Dutch and Old English works, but these are not to be brought into comparison. As was natural, then, I have treated the Middle High German grammar, and the Old High German, which is inseparable from it, in much greater detail than the remaining languages.’¹

At the same time there are other passages showing that his interest in the German language sometimes wandered away from his best-loved poets. It was more robust and positive than one might gather from this passage taken separately.

¹ This significant passage is on p. viii :—Das einladende studium mittel-hochdeutscher poesie führte mich zuerst auf grammatische untersuchungen; die übrigen älteren mundarten mit voller ausnahme des altnordischen, theilweiser des angelsächsischen, bieten wenig dichterisches; eine ansehnliche masse mittelniederländischer und altenglischer werke lässt sich jenen doch kaum vergleichen. Es kann darum nicht befremden, dass ich die mittel- und die von ihr unzertrennliche althochdeutsche grammatik umständlicher abgehandelt habe, als die der übrigen sprachen.

And he knew that his taste for language could stand more fatigue than his brother could. Wilhelm, he says (the difference of taste is rather amusing), Wilhelm never set out to read Ulfilas or Otfried or Notker from beginning to end carefully; but this careful reading is the way to make discoveries, says Jacob, and he himself has read those authors through repeatedly and has not done with them. So one sees that there is little weakness in his love of poetical beauty; if he never forgets Walther and Wolfram, he does not allow them to discourage industry. Indeed, the rich details of the *Grammar*, the *Mythology*, and the *Legal Antiquities*—not to speak of the *Dictionary* or the *Weisthümer*—are not called together by mere romantic memory of old rhymes, though that is a strong part of the spell.

I may observe that Jacob Grimm had a very keen sense for pedantry; he knew that words established in common use are not to be given up on irrelevant, however strictly scientific, grounds—so when he means Anglo-Saxon he says Anglo-Saxon. O.E. may be a convenient symbol to denote the same, but ‘Old English’ has a meaning of its own which neither the Philological Society nor its Dictionary has any right to extirpate.

He is not content with this short account of his procedure and motives; he is not done with Middle High German poetry; he lets himself go still further; in the preface to a grammar, with *Lautverschiebung* to come, and *Umlaut* and *Ablaut* and strong and weak declensions and conjugations, he writes a whole fresh paragraph in praise of Walther and Wolfram, Hartmann and Gottfried (this is the second preface 1822), even quoting a phrase of Walther’s and calling attention to one particular poem, the poem of old age: *owê war sint verswunden alliu mîniu jâr!* It is not exactly business, but it is very like Jacob Grimm.

The brothers Grimm have a place in the history of the Romantic School, but they are not subject to every vanity of that creature. They had not much taste for romantic excursions and inventions; their temper is just the opposite of that empty romantic craving, like the hunger of lean kine, which

sent the poets and novelists ranging over the Universe in search of subjects, properties, and local colour. There is a most significant passage in the tract *Ueber meine Entlassung*:—‘Authors who take up a neglected field are often absorbed in their devotion; I hope that no one who knows my work will be able to charge me with indifference to the authority of the present time over our language, our poetry, our rights and institutions. Even if we were once better off, to-day we are what we are’.¹

Jacob Grimm is of the same mind as Wordsworth; his romance is at home. He puts it finely in the dedication to Savigny: ‘True poetry’ (poetry again, you will observe, in the preface to a grammar), ‘true poetry is like a man who is happy anywhere in endless measure, if he is allowed to look at leaves and grass, to see the sun rise and set; false poetry is like a man who travels abroad in strange countries and hopes to be uplifted by the mountains of Switzerland, the sky and sea of Italy; he comes to them and is dissatisfied; he is not as happy as the man who stays at home and sees his apple tree flowering every spring, and hears the small birds singing among the branches.’ Jacob Grimm’s prejudice against the schools (*Schulweisheit*) is expressed in this context as strongly as Wordsworth’s; Nature as against school learning is revered with the same certainty of choice. It is perplexing at first to find this faith in Nature and this hatred of the schools proclaimed as an introduction to the first and second *Lautverschiebung* and other branches of learning. But there is no real difficulty. *Schulweisheit* means modern rationalism; something like the Eighteenth Century in Carlyle; the conceited and self-confident intellect which very probably cares as little for the first as for the second *Lautverschiebung*, and only knows Walther and Wolfram from the play-bill of Wagner’s opera.

¹ Schriftsteller, die sich einem verlassnen felde widmen, pflegen ihm vorliebe zuzuwenden; ich hoffe, wer meine arbeit näher kennt, dasz er mir keine art geringhaltung des groszen rechts, welches der waltenden gegenwart über unsere sprache, poesie, rechte und einrichtungen gebührt, nachweisen könne, denn selbst wo wir sonst besser waren, müssen wir heute so sein, wie wir sind.

Philology, anyhow, can be practised by the simple-minded ; that seems to come out as a fair inference. It does not require what the worldling calls cleverness. But we must be on our guard against a voluntary humility.

All this work and more was done, the *Rechtsalterthümer* in 1828, the *Mythologie* in 1835, *Reinhart* completed and published in 1834, before the adventure which put the names of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in the public history of Germany and Europe—the protest of the seven professors of Göttingen against the tyranny of Ernest, King of Hanover.

Jacob Grimm's tract on his expulsion is what one might expect from his noble spirit; there is nothing mean in it; there are no personalities except as touching the king, the prorector of the University, the deans of faculties, and 'my brother'; he does not even give the names of the seven; neither Dahlmann nor Gervinus nor Ewald is there—I cannot find the name of any single person except the late king, William IV, and Ernest, Duke of Cumberland.

The character of Jacob Grimm was brought to the touchstone; his own report of the ordeal may be trusted; an excerpt from the Chancery of Heaven could hardly be more sincere. His political faith is simple. His country is Hesse and Germany; he respects the powers that be; he belongs to no party; he has no extreme faith in parliamentary government; constitutions have a negative value—they are dikes against a devastating flood, while positive fertility is given by the benevolent grace of the monarch. But William IV had established a constitution, and Ernest had by two successive decrees revoked it. In the sight of Grimm, Ernest had perjured himself, and it was the duty of *Georgia Augusta*, the University of Göttingen, to protest.

The brothers Grimm, against their will, had been led away from Hesse into Hanover; and Hanover had thrown them out in December, 1831. Berlin took them up, and there they lived happily enough, and went on working.

Jacob Grimm, in the quiet end of his days, seems to have felt that the learned world was moving away from him; there is sadness in his voice as he speaks of the cool reception

given to his *Weisthümer*, the great collection of German local laws and customs. In 1839, for the first two volumes, he writes with the old spirit, the same enthusiasm as in the preface to the *Meistergesang* or the *Grammar*. The *Weisthümer* are a fresh springing well, and he trusts the reading public to avail themselves of it. The new collection is destined to enrich and transform the history of German law, to give colour and warmth to the history of the German race, and contribute largely to the sciences of language, mythology, and manners.

In Berlin, at the end of his life, writing on the 13th of December, 1862, for the fourth volume, he confesses that he has been disappointed: 'My collection has been rather coolly received, and there has been no great rush of scholars to this fountain.'¹ A little disappointed, but with all his old courage and industry, he faces the evening. 'Now is the time when all the lights wax dim.'

For every student it must be of interest to follow the record of so great a learner and teacher, so enthusiastic and so painstaking. And by the way it may be interesting to compare the opinions of Jacob Grimm with those of his great contemporary Hegel. The men resemble one another in their vast ideals and their capacity for taking pains; and Hegel was, further, himself a student of literary history and especially of poetry. At first we may be inclined to say that he and Jacob Grimm divide the range of poetry between them; Hegel's poets are the tragedians, while for Grimm dramatic poetry is something like the devil; it is that mode of human thought most different from Nature-poetry, from the inspired original epic of the golden heroic age. Hegel speaks slightly of the *Nibelungen* (though he respects Ossian); he looks like a champion of the classics against the barbarism of the North. But he is much more liberal than he sometimes appears, and more in agreement with the tastes of the brothers Grimm. He is fond of ballads; he names

¹ Meine samlung ist doch lau empfangen worden, und die forschler sind dieser quelle wenig zugetreten.

Fauriel's collection of Romaic popular songs; he has higher praise for the Arabian poems of the 'Ignorance'; the Cid is one of his heroes; and his descriptions of the heroic age and of the age of chivalry show his talent as an abstractor of quintessence, as well as his sympathy with the literary fashions of his time, even with the Romantic School. Hegel died nine years before the Grimms came to Berlin.

Grimm's large additions to positive science seem at times like the result of chance. They came as a precipitate from the most extraordinary vague vapour of ideas—a strange enthusiastic religion, the worship of an imaginary golden age. In details, the work of Jacob Grimm is sometimes as extravagant as the derivation of *cheval* from *equus*: Plato's *Cratylus* is no more antiquated in philology than some of the early papers of Jacob Grimm. But the cloud of his fancies and aspirations had fire and life in it; and the history of Jacob Grimm, his progress and his conquests, is a demonstration of the power of that great god *Wish* whom Jacob Grimm was the first to name.¹ The moral seems to be *Fay ce que voudras*, when that counsel is rightly understood. It was never intended for any but honourable persons, and of such was Jacob Grimm, and Wilhelm his brother.

¹ *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835), p. 99.

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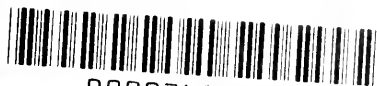
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